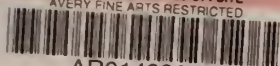


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MEMORIAL

OF

C. E. MCKAY,

DEMONSTRATING

Against the right of suffrage being granted to women.

FEBRUARY 10, 1870.—Referred to the Committee on the District of Columbia and ordered to be printed.

Presented to the Committee on the District of Columbia, by Mrs. C. E. McKay, of Massachusetts.

It has been said by members of Congress and others, that the answer to the agitating question of woman suffrage depends on the choice of woman; that when a majority of the women of the United States wish to vote, they will be admitted to the polls.

Hitherto the discussion of the subject, so far as women are concerned, has been chiefly one-sided. Not that all the woman talent of the country would be found with the advocates of woman suffrage, but primarily because a large majority of women are too busy with their legitimate duties to give sufficient attention to the subject to become its outspoken opponents, and partly because many intelligent, thinking women, while they would deprecate such a result as a calamity, have not believed in its possibility.

I therefore beg leave respectfully to represent to this honorable body some reasons why we do not want the ballot; and in saying that we do not want it, I believe that I express the sentiment of a large proportion of my countrywomen.

First, then, we do not want the ballot, because it lies wholly outside of what we consider our appropriate sphere of life and line of duty. Were women ten times wiser than men, all that amount of wisdom would not be too much for their daily requirements in their present relations to the social system, for the proper administration of household affairs, and the suitable training of those who are to become the men and women of the succeeding generation.

But no sooner will it be the privilege of women to vote, than it will become their duty not only to drop a slip of paper into the ballot-box a few times in a year, but to make themselves so thoroughly acquainted with a class of subjects quite foreign to their tastes and ordinary occupations as to be able to cast an enlightened and conscientious vote.

Thus the duties involved in it would be a superadded weight to the burden already in most cases sufficiently onerous. Why, therefore

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should we tempt our legislators to put a yoke on the neck of women which neither our mothers nor we were able to bear?

But our greatest reason for deprecating universal woman suffrage is, that we believe it would imperil the safety of the republic by an immense increase of the unintelligent and incompetent vote.

There are reasons which lie deep in the nature of things, and the very constitution of the race, why, among the masses of the ignorant and uncultivated, women are less capable than men of forming opinions which would lead to a safe exercise of the elective franchise. The duties and daily labors of the poor man lead him out among men, where, even if he cannot read, his opinions are formed by observation and contact with minds superior to his own. But how can the poor woman, overburdened with the care of her children and the daily struggle for life, busy all day in the kitchen, standing at the wash-tub, form any correct opinion as to who shall best make and administer the law which she cannot read, and guide the state, the significance of which she cannot comprehend? I have spent several years in close contact with the freed men and women of the South, and I believe others who have closely observed them will bear me out in the testimony, that the poor colored women are far more ignorant and imbruted, or, as they express it, *trifling*, than the men. This, I think, is also true of the poor whites of the South, and of the great mass of ignorant foreigners which everywhere throng our shores and make up so large a portion of our population. The admission to the polls of 2,000,000 of colored men, just redeemed from slavery, was a matter of justice as well as a political necessity, but it was not accomplished without the gravest anxiety as to the result. Why should the danger be increased by the addition of the same or nearly the same number of colored women? Ignorant women may indeed be in their narrow sphere models of virtue, accomplishing all that Providence and nature demand of them; but admitted to the polls, they would only be so much new material for the manipulation of intriguing wire pullers and crafty politicians, to say nothing of the new lever which would thus be placed in the hands of the Catholic priesthood. Yet some of the most gifted minds of the country are demanding that to them shall be committed the sacred right and privilege of suffrage! How can they? Is it urged that the right of suffrage conferred on woman would stimulate her to higher intellectual attainments in order that she may more intelligently exercise that right? The argument, as applied to general suffrage, admits of a doubt; but if granted, we would say that the safety of the whole is of more importance than the elevation of a part; that it is never wise to risk killing the patient in order to cure the disease; that the preservation of the republic is the first and greatest interest of all men and women, and that nothing could be a permanent advantage to woman which would be a disadvantage to the body-politic.

As to the question of remunerative labor for women, we gladly concede that much has been done by the advocates of "women's rights" to educate public opinion on that subject, and to bring it to a proper sense of the needs and deserts of women. We heartily thank them for this, and believe that great progress can be made in that direction without incurring the risk of overturning the present foundations of society.

Already the pulpit, the press, the stage, the lecture-platform, the medical profession, as well as the teacher's chair, are open to her. Let her to whom Providence has not committed the more important and dignified offices of wife and mother, go in and win in these wide fields of activity such laurels as she may. Should she fail here, she will find that there still remains much land to be possessed in the more common and unambitious walks of life.

In conclusion, we believe that the country is at present in no condition to try so important an experiment. If so unwished-for a reorganization of society must come, we pray Heaven that it may at least be deferred until the results of the past decade are secured; that the good ship of state may have time to recover itself from its recent encounters, to trim its sails, and tauten its cordage, before it plunges into another stormy sea of excitement and contention.

C. E. MCKAY.



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